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General Assembly

Official Records

Disarmament Commission

266th meeting

Wednesday, 22 December 2004, 3 p.m.
New York

Chairperson: Mr. Adamia ..... (Georgia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Opening of the session

The Chairman: I declare open the 2005 organizational session of the Disarmament Commission.

As in past years, the Commission has been convened today for a brief session to deal with its organizational matters, including the election of the Chairman and of other members of the Bureau for 2005 and the adoption of a draft provisional agenda for the next substantive session of the Disarmament Commission.

We will not at this stage take up the issue of the election of the chairpersons of the subsidiary bodies of the Commission, for obvious reasons. In the absence of agreement on the agenda items to be discussed at next year's substantive session, it would seem premature to elect the chairpersons of the two working groups. Moreover, in accordance with decision 52/492 of September 1998, both chairpersons will be elected for the full three-year cycle. That, in turn, adds to the heavy responsibility of chairing the groups' deliberations and requires a serious personal commitment on the part of future chairpersons.

Before turning to the adoption of the agenda for today, I give the floor to the representative of the United States.

Ms. Messing (United States of America): The United States will not participate in any decisions made during today's session.

The Chairman: I thank the representative of the United States, but we have to adopt an agenda, anyway.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Election of the Chairman and other officers

The Chairman: In accordance with the established practice of rotation, the Group of African States has the honour to nominate the candidate for the post of Chairman of the Commission for its 2005 session. I have received a note from the Chairman of that Group informing me that the Group has not yet endorsed a candidate and that intensive consultations are still going on. As a result, I propose that the Commission suspend consideration of this item at this stage and return to it at a later date.

In order for the Commission to continue its consultations and preparatory work for the 2005 substantive session, I would like to propose, subject to delegations' consent and on the understanding that it will not create any precedent whatsoever, the appointment of one of the current Vice-Chairpersons from the Group of Asian States, Mr. Alisher Vohidov of Uzbekistan, as Acting Chairman of the Commission, to perform the duties of the Chair until such time as the Group of African States completes its consultations

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and is ready to nominate a candidate for the post of Chairman of the Commission for 2005.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Commission wishes to proceed accordingly.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: On behalf of the Commission and on my own behalf, I congratulate Ambassador Alisher Vohidov on his appointment to this high office. I express our commonly shared view when I say that we are looking forward to benefiting from his broad experience and diplomatic skills. We wish him success in discharging his newly assumed important duties. For our part, we shall remain at his service, with support and counsel as need be. With those brief remarks, I invite Ambassador Alisher Vohidov to take his place at the podium.

Mr. Vohidov (Uzbekistan), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The Acting Chairman: At the outset, allow me to express my gratitude to the members of the Commission for the important task that they have entrusted to me as Acting Chairman of the Commission at this organizational session. I am counting on the support and the cooperation of all Member States in the pursuit of the important tasks ahead.

Before turning to the next item of our agenda, allow me to pay a well-deserved tribute to the Chairman of the 2004 session of the Disarmament Commission, Ambassador Revaz Adamia, for the guidance and the leadership he provided to the Commission. I also express my gratitude to other members of the Bureau for their resolute and tireless efforts. Finally, allow me to thank delegations for their constructive spirit and cooperation during the Commission's deliberations last year.

Of course, it is a disappointment for us all that, at the end of the day, it was not possible to overcome a few remaining obstacles to the successful conclusion of the Commission's work. It is not an easy task to try to achieve a perfect balance of interests on issues which go to the core of security concepts. However, in spite of the Commission's inability to reach consensus on its agenda, I am pleased to note that during the last year of deliberations we came very close to an agreement. While introducing the draft resolution of the First Committee, Ambassador Adamia, Chairman of the Disarmament Commission, pointed to positive elements that were attained, as well as overwhelming agreement among Member States on the importance of the Disarmament Commission in general and on the necessity of revitalizing its work.

That is our past. Now, however, I shall invite the Commission to look to the future. Let me make a few general observations about the future as I see it.

The 2005 international disarmament calendar is rich with events. The outside world — the community of nations — expects much from those events, and rightfully so. That general optimism is rooted in a number of factors. Let me briefly draw the attention of the Commission to some of them.

First, despite the fact that the past four years have not been the easiest or most productive years for the international multilateral disarmament machinery, we still believe that the present international climate not only calls for urgent measures, but also allows for a wide variety of undertakings in the field of disarmament. The international disarmament community has had its share of disappointments in recent years, but it has also had positive achievements of which it can be rightly proud. We all share visions of a more secure and peaceful world, and we have the resolve to work towards their realization.

Secondly, the inability of the Conference on Disarmament and of the Disarmament Commission to yield tangible results has contributed to a heightened sense of urgency on the part of the international community to reform and revitalize the disarmament machinery in such a way as to enable it to start to adequately address and respond to emerging threats to global peace and security. That new element adds to the already existing heavy responsibility that we bear collectively and individually.

What happens within these walls is not isolated; it is an integral part of global disarmament efforts at all levels. But the emergence of new kinds of threats, be they governmental or non-governmental, the fact that they appear at the forefront of security concerns and the need to deal with them without further delay have created a new atmosphere of great expectation among politicians, disarmament professionals, non-governmental organizations, the academic community and civil society organizations. We hope that that overall atmosphere of great expectation will positively influence the work of the Disarmament Commission in 2005.

Here, I must refer to the expressions of broad support for the Disarmament Commission that came from practically all delegations during the recent session of the First Committee. Even the criticism directed at the Commission was of a constructive nature. No one questioned its overall usefulness; rather, delegations pointed to shortcomings and spoke in a businesslike manner of ways and means to make the Commission's work more relevant and responsive to immediate security challenges. We base our approach to the prospects of the Disarmament Commission in 2005 on that support and that expressed good will.

We now continue with the third item on our agenda, namely, the election of other officers of the Disarmament Commission for 2005.

As in the case of the chairmanship, other officers of the Bureau are elected on the basis of the established principle of rotation. Accordingly, it is the turn of the Group of Eastern European States to nominate the candidate for Rapporteur of the Commission for the 2005 substantive session. I wish to inform delegations that that Group is still conducting consultations and that it will be in a position to nominate its candidate for Rapporteur at a later stage.

As I said earlier, the consultations are still being carried out within the Group of African States, the Group of Western European and Other States and the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States. Therefore, I would suggest that the election of the remaining vice-chairpersons be taken up at a later stage.

I should now like to proceed with the election of the candidate for vice-chair already nominated by his regional group. In that connection, I would like to inform the Commission that the Group of Asian States has nominated Mr. Lew Kwang-chul of the Republic of Korea as Vice-Chairman of the Commission from the Group of Asian States. I understand that there is general agreement in the Commission that Mr. Lew Kwang-chul should be elected as Vice-Chairman from the Asian Group of States.

If there is no objection, and if there are no comments, I shall take it that the Commission wishes to elect by acclamation the representative of the Republic of Korea as Vice-Chairman of the Commission at its 2005 substantive session.

It was so decided.

The Acting Chairman: Allow me, on behalf of the Commission, to warmly congratulate the elected officer and to wish him every success in carrying out his duties. I look forward to working with him and with the other members of the Bureau once they are elected.

As members of the Commission are aware, the First Committee recommended that the General Assembly adopt a resolution that has specific bearing on the work of the Commission. For the sake of clarity and for the benefit of members, I would like to refer to that resolution.

Resolution 59/105, entitled "Report of the Disarmament Commission", was adopted by the General Assembly on 3 December 2004 under agenda item 67 (d). The relevant paragraphs of the draft resolution, namely, operative paragraphs 5 and 6, read as follows:

> "Recommends that the Disarmament Commission consider the following items at its 2005 substantive session:
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> "(*a*) [To be determined];
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> "(*b*) [To be determined];
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> "Requests the Disarmament Commission to meet for a period not exceeding three weeks during 2005, namely, from 18 July to 5 August, and to submit a substantive report to the General Assembly at its sixtieth session".

I have just outlined the resolution which contains the mandate for the upcoming work of the Disarmament Commission. Let me at this stage make a few remarks of both a procedural and a substantive nature. Sub-paragraphs 5 (a) and (b) of resolution 59/105 are left blank and take into consideration the inability of the Commission to reach agreement at its 2004 session. Most delegations made comments about this during the work of the First Committee. We fully share their concerns. Of course, it would have been better if we had been able at that stage to agree on one nuclear and one conventional item, as we are mandated to do. However, that was not the case. We all know that reaching consensus on two substantive items will not be an easy or a fast process. Rather, it will require a series of consultations and open-ended meetings and some carefully crafted compromises on the part of all delegations.

To facilitate that consensus-building, I intend, based on last year's deliberations, to consult regional groups and individual delegations and to hold open-ended meetings with the participation of the full membership of the Commission. Those activities will start as early as the second part of January. After the first round of consultations, and based on the views expressed by delegations, we will compile a list of three or four items — or two items each on nuclear and conventional topics — and will present it to members for a second and, if need be, third round of informals. The idea is to have the agreed-upon items well in advance of the beginning of the Commission's deliberations. That will leave us ample time to select the chairpersons of the two working groups, who, as members are aware, will then continue in that capacity until the end of the three-year cycle of deliberations.

Every three years the Commission and its members are confronted with this problem. Each time, the Commission has been able to overcome differences and adopt topics worthy of our focused attention. Most often, compromise comes through a prolonged and painful process of negotiation, but once in a while life itself supplies items which are acute and which do not leave us the luxury of long delays and prevarication. I think that we are at that kind of juncture.

It appears that no delegation wishes to make a statement or comments.

Draft provisional agenda for the substantive session of the Disarmament Commission in 2005

The Acting Chairman: The draft provisional agenda for the substantive session of the Disarmament Commission in 2005 is contained in document A/CN.10/L.57.

The Commission will adopt the draft provisional agenda for its 2005 substantive session as contained in document A/CN.10/L.57 at a later stage, when we have completed our organizational session.

The Commission is also invited to take note of document A/CN.10/2005/CRP.1, containing the provisional programme of work and a timetable setting out somewhat delayed information on our future work.

We shall return to both those documents in due course.

Organizational matters

The Acting Chairman: The Disarmament Commission is a subsidiary body of the General Assembly and meets annually. Its sessions are financed from the regular budget and do not require additional funding. Moreover, in accordance with decision 52/492 of 1998, the annual substantive session of the Commission should last three weeks. As a result, during the 2005 session the Commission will work on the basis of its usual practice, namely, a full three-week session. With that in mind, the Secretariat has arranged that the dates for the 2005 substantive session would be from 18 July to 5 August instead of the usual April dates.

Allow me to add that those dates were chosen taking into consideration the disarmament calendar for the next year, and especially the 2005 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which will precede the Commission's substantive session. Delegations are asked kindly to make note of those dates.

While we are considering the provisional agenda for the 2005 substantive session, let us also address the establishment of the working groups to deal with the two substantive agenda items. I suggest that we now re-establish Working Groups I and II to deal with the two specific items which, as I mentioned earlier, will be decided upon in the course of consultations. Moreover, as in previous years, we have to establish the Committee of the Whole to deal with other substantive and organizational matters.

If there are no comments, I will take it that the Commission wishes to establish those three bodies.

It was so decided.

The Acting Chairman: I should like to note that, according to established practice, all organizational matters should be concluded at the organizational session of the Disarmament Commission. Unfortunately, as I have already informed the Commission, we are not in a position to deal with the appointment of the chairpersons of the two subsidiary bodies, since the regional groups will have to agree on substantive items for the two working groups.

However, there are several issues that are left pending at this stage, namely, the nomination of candidatures for the chairperson and the remaining posts of the vice-chairs. As I have said, this process

will require some time to be finalized. Accordingly, it might be advisable for the Commission to suspend this organizational session for now so that delegations can carry out further consultations on those issues.

If there is no objection, I shall take it that it is the wish of the Disarmament Commission to suspend the 2005 organizational session and to resume it at a later date.

It was so decided.

Other business

The Acting Chairman: I call on the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Bader (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): We thank you, Sir, for having convened this meeting. We also thank you for having proposed the dates of 18 July to 5 August 2005 for the resumed session.

With respect to those dates, I believe that they are very late and will somewhat disrupt our timetable because they coincide with the vacations of many representatives to the Commission. I would therefore ask if it might be possible to move those dates forward a little. For instance, might we resume the session in June?

The Acting Chairman: The dates for the forthcoming resumed session were established by the resolution adopted by the General Assembly and discussed previously within the First Committee, and there were no objections regarding them. Thus, at this stage I do not see the possibility of again raising the question before the General Assembly.

Of course, if a majority of the Commission were to wish to address this issue, we should consider once again the possibility of raising the question, but the extensive consultations of the First Committee do not give us the space now to negotiate those dates.

I should like to encourage regional groups to proceed with their consultations on an urgent basis and to submit their nominations as quickly as possible.

The next meeting of the Disarmament Commission will be announced in the *Journal of the United Nations*.

The meeting was suspended at 3.55 p.m.